



Companions & Homemakers™

We know what you're going through.

Testimony to the Aging Committee Regarding S.B. No. 244, "An Act Increasing Home Care Provider Rates."

March 4, 2014

Good morning Chairman Ayala, Serra and Members of the Aging Committee:

My name is Jonathan Hunt and I am a manager at Companions & Homemakers, Inc., a homemaker-companion agency with 11 offices throughout Connecticut. We are an agency registered with the Department of Consumer Protection. We provide home care services to seniors under the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders administered by the Department of Social Services. As a manager, I work every day with caregivers, clients, and their families.

I am here to speak on behalf of our 3,000 caregiver employees who provide essential care services to Connecticut's elderly population. These services include companionship, house cleaning, meal preparation, grocery shopping, transportation to medical appointments and help with daily personal care.

The quality and consistency of the provision of these services is in a rapid free fall due to reimbursement rates that do not allow us to pay a decent living wage to our caregivers. When Companions & Homemakers was founded, our caregiver positions paid 2 to 3 dollars or more over the minimum wage—and they should.

Many of these positions are in small, 2-hour increments. They require the employee to travel to the assignment and often transport the client or run errands during those 2 hours using their own car and gas. Many of our staff are working for their rent, food and other necessities like childcare. Our caregivers live paycheck-to-paycheck. Please keep in mind this is not the extra spending money of a high school student.

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Since 1994, the minimum wage has increased over 103% while our reimbursement rate has only increased 17%. With the most recent minimum wage increase in January, we are unable to increase our rate for companion services above the new minimum. Again, these are not minimum wage jobs and our caregivers have rightfully had enough.

Our office staff stress levels are at an all-time high as they struggle to secure care for an elderly client who needs a ride to her doctor. Understandably, most caregivers are saying "it's enough!," as they would have to drive to the client, pick up the client, and drive to the appointment and back. For \$17.40!?

At each legislative session since 2010 we have been told "not to ask for an increase because there is no money." Yet, each session adds more costs to us. Sick pay, medical insurance, training etc.—where do we get the money? Furthermore, the requirements to become a caregiver continue to increase substantially, while the benefits continue to decrease. Workers have little incentive to become caregivers when they face the reality of having to use their own gas and transportation to carry out their duties.

A client who needs care 2 hours, twice a day, can see upwards of 20 to 30 caregivers in a year due to turnover caused by low pay. For us, we promise to put any new reimbursement towards our employees' wage and direct cost to wages. Our caregivers deserve no less.

Please pass S.B. No. 244 and increase providers' reimbursement rates.

Thank you and I would be happy to take your questions.